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Stopping Rape: Effective Avoidance Strategies

Pauline B. Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien

Try and fight him . . . it's more natural to be angry, if you let yourself feel the anger, maybe that'll give you strength . . . I used to think you could give him some kind of Jesus rap . . . I used to think you could reason 'em out of it, and talk to them like a human being, say "OK you don't want to do this, what are you doing?" . . . He seemed to listen to anger, yelling.

INTERVIEWER: What methods do you think would be ineffective, once a man tries to accost a woman?

INTERVIEWEE: Crying and pleading and begging.
[Interview with a raped woman]

Women threatened with rape are in a double bind. On the one hand we are told, "Fighting back will only excite him. Fighting back will only get him angry," advice which assumes that the assailant is not already angry and that immediate retaliation is the most dangerous strategy. We are warned as well that resistance will result in serious injury, if not mutilation and death; our mangled bodies will turn up in garbage cans and under park benches.

This paper is based on research funded by the Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape of the National Institute of Mental Health, grant MH 29311-0. An earlier version was presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, New York, 1980, entitled "How to Say No to Storaska and Survive: Rape Avoidance Strategies." Frederick Storaska is the author of a book that is demeaning to women and is full of misinformation (*How to Say No to a Rapist and Survive* [New York: Random House, 1975]).

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On the other hand, rape has traditionally and legally been defined as an adult man's carnal knowledge of a woman *by force and against her will* (the man must be over fourteen and the woman must not be his wife).¹ According to this definition, it is not enough that a man used or threatened to use force for the act to be considered rape; a man can compel a woman to have sex and still not legally be acting against her will. Therefore, in order to prove legally that what happened was rape, the woman has to prove that it was indeed against her will. The best way to prove that she is not willing to be forced to have sex is *not* by saying "Please don't" or, "I have my period." The best way to prove that the act is not mutually consensual is by physically resisting.² In this article we describe the strategies that have prevented rape and the conditions under which they were effective. The 1976 Queen's Bench study was the first to show that "acting like a lady" was more likely to result in rape than in rape avoidance.³ More recently, William Sanders, Jennie McIntyre, and Richard Block and Wesley Skogan—the latter using national victimization data—have come to similar conclusions.⁴ All the studies based on interviews with raped women and women who prevented their rapes, as well as Block and Skogan's work, find that active strategies, notably fighting back, are effective in rape avoidance.

1. Wallace D. Lok, "What Has Reform of Rape Legislation Wrought?" *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (1981): 28–52. The Illinois sexual assault statute that went into effect in July 1984 omits the phrase "against her will." Catharine MacKinnon suggests that consent should be proven by the defense rather than disproven by the prosecution, making consent an "affirmative defense." See "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8, no. 4 (1983): 635–58, esp. 648, n. 29.

2. In fact, the *People v. Joel Warren*, 446 N.W. 2d 591, 1983, Illinois Appellate Court Fifth District (no. 82-180) reversed an original decision that found an assailant guilty of two counts of deviate sexual assault. The court reasoned that the complainant's "failure to resist when it was within her power to do so conveys the impression of consent regardless of her mental state, amounts to consent and removes from the act performed an essential element of the crime." The defendant maintained "that once complainant became aware that defendant intended to engage in sexual relations, it was incumbent upon her to resist." This decision was rendered even though the woman was five feet two inches and weighed one hundred pounds and the assailant was over six feet and weighed 185 pounds, the attack took place in an isolated area, and the woman was afraid that physically assaulting the man would anger him.

3. Queen's Bench Foundation, "Rape: Prevention and Resistance" (Queen's Bench Organization, 1255 Post St., San Francisco, 1976). See also Greer Litton Fox, "'Nice Girl': Social Control of Women through a Value Construct," *Signs* 2, no. 4 (1977): 805–17.

4. William B. Sanders, *Rape and Woman's Identity* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980); Jennie J. McIntyre, "Victim Response to Rape: Alternative Outcomes" (final report to National Institute of Mental Health, grant R01MH29045); Richard Block and Wesley G. Skogan, "Resistance and Outcome in Robbery and Rape: Non-fatal, Stranger to Stranger Violence" (Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1982).

Our study also addresses important theoretical issues. For many years the question whether situational or personality factors have most influence in determining behavior has been central in social psychology, with sociologists leaning toward the former and psychologists and psychiatrists toward the latter. In this study, we do not deal with personality per se, partly because we do not think there are valid and reliable ways of measuring personality in interviews. More important, we do not use personality variables because research looking at the association of personality and victimization neglects variables such as autonomy training, independence, and competence.⁵

Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of 94 interviews with women eighteen or older who had been attacked and who had either avoided being raped ($N = 51$) or been raped ($N = 43$) in the two years prior to the interview. We limited the sample to women who experienced either force or the threat of force. The interview consisted of a self-report dealing with demographic variables, and answers to unstructured and semistructured questions about situational and background factors. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, we added questions when unanticipated patterns emerged—for instance, on incest, sexual assault in childhood, or other violence in the woman's life, or on whether the woman was primarily concerned with being killed or mutilated or primarily concerned with not being raped. The first part of the interview addressed such situational variables as the presence of a weapon, the number of assailants, the response of the woman, the acts that occurred during the assault, the degree of acquaintance with the assailant. The second part dealt with background variables, with questions about a woman's sense of competence and autonomy and about her socialization as a child and an adult into a traditional female role. We asked the raped woman about how her significant others responded to the assault and about interaction with institutions such as the police, hospitals, and therapists. We also examined the negotiation process between the woman and her assailant(s) if such negotiation took place.

Eighty percent of the interviews were conducted by the principal

5. Elsewhere we have addressed childhood and adult socialization as well as background and situational variables. Pauline B. Bart and Ellen Perlmutter, "Socialization and Rape Avoidance" (paper presented at the Association for Women in Psychology, Santa Monica, Calif., 1980); Bart, "A Study of Women Who Both Were Raped and Avoided Rape," *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (1981): 123–37; Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien, "Stopping Rape: Strategies for Success" (Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago Health Sciences Center, 1983).

investigator (Pauline Bart) and 20 percent by a female clinical psychologist (Marlyn Grossman). The interviews lasted from one-and-a-half to six hours, depending on the subject's desire to talk and on the history of violence in her individual life. These interviews were transcribed.

Because of the nature of our major research question, we could not obtain a random sample. Therefore, following a pretest, we launched a campaign to find respondents and recruited 94 women through newspaper ads (including major Black and Hispanic papers), press releases, public service announcements (the radio announcements were in both English and Spanish), appearances on radio and television, flyers, and contacts initiated through friendship networks of the project staff.

The resulting purposive, that is, nonrandom sample, when compared to the female population of the Chicago standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA), which includes Cook and the surrounding counties, was disproportionately white, young, and unmarried (either single or divorced). Also none of the women who responded was engaged only in domestic labor at the time of the interview; all were either working outside the home or attending school. However, while the sample is not representative of women in the Chicago SMSA, it is not very different from the population of raped women and rape avoiders in national victimization data, except for an overrepresentation of white women (tables 1 and 2).⁶ In addition to the demographic bias, the sample is shaped by the fact that the participants were volunteers.⁷ A final source of possible bias in our sample was the very high proportion of women who had been raped by strangers or near strangers (approximately 80 percent).⁸ An additional 10 percent were attacked by men they had met for the first time just prior to the assault.

Actually, we currently have no way of knowing what the "real" population of women who have been sexually assaulted looks like. On the one hand, rapes reported to the police are known to be gross undercounts of total rapes and to involve a disproportionate number of rapes by

6. Joan McDermott, "Rape Victimization in 26 American Cities" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979).

7. We attempted to allow for bias through the use of volunteers in two ways: we first asked women why they volunteered (the two primary motives proved to be altruism and catharsis, often in combination); and we then asked them where they had learned about the study. Our inquiries revealed no substantial bias from a single source.

8. While rapes reported to the police and McDermott's secondary analysis of a "representative sample of 10,000 households" also show similarly high rates of rape by strangers, other studies have found that as many as half the rapes involved assailants known to the woman: Pauline B. Bart, "Rape Doesn't End with a Kiss," *Viva*, June 1975, pp. 39–41, 100–101; Joseph J. Peters, *The Philadelphia Rape Victim Project in Forcible Rape: The Crime, the Victim, and the Offender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Menachem Amir, *Patterns of Forcible Rape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics		
	%	N
Race:		
White	81	76
Black	15	14
Hispanic	4	4
Religion:		
Protestant	38	35
Catholic	35	33
Jewish	19	18
No religion	6	...
Other	2	...
Marital status:		
Never married	58	54
Married, living with husband	15	14
Married, not living with husband	6	6
Divorced	19	18
Married, divorcing	1	...
Missing information	1	...
Education:		
High school or less	12	11
Some college	44	41
Four-year degree	19	18
Some graduate work	26	24
Occupation:		
Dependent	2	2
Homemaker	2	2
Blue-collar worker	10	9
Clerical worker	33	32
Professional	31	29
Student	9	8
Interim employment (usually student)	12	11
Missing information	1	...

NOTE.—Interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 72. The mean age was 28.14 years.

strangers.⁹ On the other hand, victimization researchers have found that some respondents fail to tell interviewers about rapes actually reported to the police.¹⁰ The problem of defining rape adds further complications; many women who agree that they have been forced to have sex do not label the act as rape.¹¹

9. Bart, "Rape Doesn't End."

10. McDermott (n. 6 above).

11. Irene Hanson Frieze et al., "Psychological Factors in Violent Marriages" (Department of Psychology, University of Pittsburgh, 1979); Frieze, "Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Marital Rape," *Signs* 8, no. 3 (1983): 532–53.

Table 2

Comparison of Data on Sexually Assailed Women

	Bart and O'Brien (N = 94) (%)	McIntyre (N = 32) (%)	Queen's Bench (N = 108) (%)	National Victimization Surveys ^a (N = approx. 22,000) (%)
Age:				
Under 25	36	66 ^b	71	59
Over 35	10	...	7	15
Race:				
White	81	75	79	69
Nonwhite	19	...	21	31
Marital status:				
Single	57	68	80	58
Married	16	...	10	22
Separated or divorced	27	...	11	17
Widowed .....	...	...	...	3
Work status:				
Employed full-time	62	46	39	46
Employed part-time	13	...	...	...
Student	12	35	37	15
Unemployed	8	...	13	6
Homemaker	4	...	1	33
Missing information	1	...	...	...
Attacked by stranger	78 ^c	77	81	82
Rape completed	46	60	63	33
Weapon present	46	...	33	40
Attacked by multiple assailants	13	14	15	16
Reported attack to police	66	...	...	56

SOURCES.—Jennie J. McIntyre, "Victim Response to Rape: Alternative Outcomes" (final report to National Institute of Mental Health, grant R01MH29045); Queen's Bench Foundation, "Rape: Prevention and Resistance" (Queen's Bench Organization, 1255 Post St., San Francisco, California, 1976); Joan McDermott, "Rape Victimization in 26 American Cities" (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, Government Printing Office, 1979).

^aAll percentages (except for the percent attacked by strangers) are calculated for attacks by strangers only.

^bPercentage calculated for women under 26, not 25.

^cIncludes 71 percent raped by total strangers and 7 percent raped by men known by sight or met on a casual first encounter.

We paid the women \$25.00 for their time; moreover, all their expenses—including babysitting and travel for those who were from outside Chicago—were reimbursed. When the women telephoned us initially, we told them of the remuneration, and we asked for their own definition of the situation. Specifically, we asked them to tell us whether they had been raped or had been attacked but had avoided being raped. In this way, the

women defined themselves into the two parts of the sample: rape avoiders and raped women.

A serendipitous finding was that while there was no problem in differentiating rape from seduction, there was no hard and fast line differentiating rape from rape avoidance.¹² Since we can conceptualize rape as a continuum starting with the first approach, verbal or physical, and ending with the rapist's penetration and intercourse to orgasm, any interruption in the continuum before the rapist's orgasm could theoretically be considered an avoidance.

In order to address this issue, we examined the data in three ways: the woman's perception of herself as either a raped woman or one who had avoided rape, the nature of the acts that occurred, and the legal definition of them.¹³ The acts consisted of genital intercourse, sodomy, fellatio, interfemoral penetration (the assailant masturbating himself between the woman's thighs), cunnilingus, digital penetration, fondling and touching, and kissing. The possible legal definitions coded (using Illinois statutes at that time) were rape, attempted rape, and deviant sexual assault. When we examined the relationship between self-perception and the acts that had occurred, we learned that, for the most part, the women define rape by what is done with a man's penis (genital intercourse, sodomy, fellatio), not by what is done to a woman's genitals (digital penetration, fondling and touching, cunnilingus) (see table 3).¹⁴

Findings

Defense Strategies

When the women described their assaults, distinct types of defense techniques emerged that were classified in the following way. A woman could

12. It has become increasingly apparent that the concept of seduction is itself a male ideology. We have found that much, if not all, of what men perceive as seduction is in fact the result of women's having decided "to put up with it" or having planned in advance to "allow" themselves to be seduced. Bart has further refined the continuum as follows: consensual sex/altruistic sex/compliant sex/rape. In consensual sex both partners are sexually aroused. In altruistic sex the man wants sex and the woman goes along with it. When men engage in altruistic sex they use the pejorative term "mercy fucking." In compliant sex one person, usually the female, engages in the act because of the adverse consequences that follow if she doesn't, although there is no threat of force. We define rape as sexual behavior the woman engages in because of force or threat of force.

13. Pauline B. Bart and Kim Scheppele, "There Ought to Be a Law: Self-Definition and Legal Definitions of Sexual Assault" (paper presented at the meetings of the American Sociological Association, New York, 1980).

14. Kim Lane Scheppele and Pauline B. Bart, "Through Women's Eyes: Defining Danger in the Wake of Sexual Assault," *Journal of Social Issues* 39, no. 2 (1983): 63-80.

1. flee or try to flee.
2. scream, yell, or talk loudly—usually in an effort to attract attention.
3. use “affective verbal” techniques such as begging and pleading with the assailant in order to gain his sympathy.
4. use “cognitive verbal” techniques, which included attempting to reason with the assailant, “conning” him, trying to make him “see her as a person,” and stalling.
5. take advantage of environmental intervention—someone or something in the surroundings that intruded on the scene and either caused the assailant to stop the assault or gave her an opportunity to escape.
6. respond with physical force, the possibilities ranging from a simple push to self-defense techniques to use of a weapon.

Avoiders used a substantially greater number of strategies than raped women. All of the five respondents who employed *no* strategies were raped; these made up 11.6 percent of the raped women in the sample. Of the respondents who used only one strategy, 30 percent (13) were raped women and 18 percent (9) were avoiders. Of the respondents who used two kinds of strategies, 28 percent (12) were raped women and 29 percent (15) were avoiders. The difference between raped women and avoiders sharply increases after this. Twenty-one percent (9) of the raped women and 35 percent (18) of the avoiders used three types of strategies; 9 percent (4) of the raped women and 18 percent (9) of the avoiders used four types of strategies. The modal number of strategies for raped women was one, while for avoiders it was three. The mean number of types of strategies for raped women was 1.86 and for avoiders was 2.53, consistent with the results reported in the Queen's Bench study.¹⁵

Not only did avoiders use more types of strategies, the strategies they used differed from the strategies of the raped women. Avoiders were more likely to flee or try to flee, to talk loudly or scream, to use physical force, and to be aided by environmental intervention. Raped women were more likely to plead. Both were about equally likely to use cognitive verbal techniques, the strategy most frequently used (see table 4).

Because we have qualitative data, we can also study the sequence of strategies. Our analysis took particular note of women who used physical strategies since most debates revolve around this response. Six women who stopped their rapes first used physical strategies and then yelled or screamed. Another effective sequence of strategies for women who stopped their rapes involved using cognitive verbal strategies, and when those proved ineffective, changing to physical strategies. Such strategies, then, can convince the assailant that the woman is serious, not just feigning

15. Queen's Bench Foundation (n. 3 above).

Table 3

Self-Perception as Raped Woman or Rape Avoider, by Occurrence of Phallic Sex (%)	Self-Perception	
	Raped Woman	Rape Avoider
Phallic sex occurred ^a (N = 45)	93	7
Phallic sex did not occur ^b (N = 49)	2	98

NOTE.—This table was constructed by Kim Scheppele.
^aPhallic sex includes any one or any combination of the following: penile-vaginal penetration, sodomy, fellatio, interfemoral penetration, or female masturbation of assailant.
^bPhallic sex is considered not to have occurred if only the following took place: digital penetration, cunnilingus, fondling, touching and kissing. It is considered not to have occurred as well in situations where the attack was thwarted before any overt sexual acts took place.

Table 4

Strategies of Rape Avoidance, by Outcome of Attack (%)	Raped Women (N = 43)	Rape Avoiders (N = 51)
Fled or tried to flee	9	33
Screamed	35	49
Used physical force	33	59
Used cognitive verbal strategies	72	67
Used affective verbal strategies	33	22
Benefited from environmental intervention	5	20
Used no strategy	12	...

resistance.¹⁶ The modal strategy for women who stopped their rapes was a combination of screaming/yelling and physical resistance. The correlation between the two strategies was +0.42 for avoiders.

Avoiding Death or Avoiding Rape

A woman's primary focus emerged during the interviews as a factor sharply differentiating raped women from rape avoiders: the women whose primary concern lay in avoiding death or mutilation have been less

16. See Roseann Giarusso et al., "Adolescents' Cues and Signals: Sex and Assault" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, San Diego, California, April 1979) for an analysis of the differences in the way in which males and females perceive the world.

likely to avoid rape than those who had a gut reaction of rage and were primarily determined not to be raped. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we were able to add a question to the interview schedule addressing this point after the pattern emerged. Twenty-eight women who were raped and 19 women who avoided rape expressed fear of death or mutilation as their foremost concern, while 3 women who were raped and 26 women who avoided rape were primarily determined not to be raped.

For example, the first woman we interviewed, a college student, was able to stop her rape even though her assailant was armed. She said, "We circled for a while; he had a knife. I was wearing some loose clothing . . . he knocked me to the ground, so he managed to get the top half of all of my clothes off and there's sort of a blank. I remember clearly wanting to fight this, not want this . . . not wanting to allow this to happen and I just thought, 'Well, I'm not going to stand for this, you know.' And I didn't. . . . He did have a knife and he did slash my coat. I didn't have any clothes on. I had an acute sense of being vigorous, stronger, and more overpowering in myself and then there was sort of a brief flurry or something . . . or sliding away." (She had, in fact, slid away from her attacker.)

This response was surprising since we had originally thought that if there were a weapon no resistance would be possible. At the same time, the women who feared death should in no way be blamed, since descriptions of rape in the media emphasize the more lurid rape/murders and give scant attention to the women who stopped their rapes.

Psychological and Bodily Consequences of Physical Resistance

The effectiveness of using physical force to resist rape proved to be our most controversial finding, albeit one that is replicated in other studies.¹⁷ We have suggested above that its effectiveness may lie in its communicating a clear message to the assailant, in addition to any physical injury he might receive or be in danger of receiving. Some assailants were not convinced by other strategies, presumably because they subscribed to the ideology prevalent in pornography and other media that women, whatever they might say, really want to be sexually assaulted. But what of the effect of this strategy on the women? We found that raped women who used physical strategies were less likely to be depressed than raped women who did not. The largest number of women who said they

17. Queen's Bench Foundation (n. 3 above); Sanders, McIntyre, and Block and Skogan (all n. 4 above).

were depressed or who had symptoms of depression such as insomnia and weight loss were among those who were raped but did not use physical strategies. There was no difference in frequency of depression among women who avoided rape by fighting back and those who avoided rape without using physical strategies. Thus we can say that one of the most important functions of physical resistance is to keep women from feeling depressed even if they have been raped.¹⁸

If what we are tapping were merely personality differences between those who physically resisted and those who did not, then we would not find differences in depression only for those women who were raped. We think the results stem from the traditional vocabulary of motives used in our society to account for rape, a vocabulary many women have internalized.¹⁹ In this vocabulary, rape is provoked by women through their dress, their carelessness, their foolhardiness in going to a "forbidden" place, such as a bar. Women are told, moreover, that they cannot be raped against their will—that, indeed, women really want to be raped and enjoy it. By resisting rape, however, women demonstrate to themselves and to others that this vocabulary does not apply to them. They are less likely to attribute their rape to their "personality defects"—weakness, cowardice, ineffectiveness—and thus less likely to say, "If only I had fought back it wouldn't have happened."²⁰ They are less likely to blame themselves and to feel depressed, more likely to gain strength from the belief that they did everything they could in that situation.

We are told that if we fight back, if we physically resist, we will pay the price through severe injury or death. This admonition is not supported by our findings or in the studies reported above. Furthermore, advising women to comply or risk injury assumes that rape in itself does not result in injury, physical as well as mental. Several women who talked to us reported serious injury from rape. One woman had a psychotic breakdown which resulted in her hospitalization. Her rapist also tore the area between her vagina and her anus so badly that it required surgical repair. In addition she became pregnant and had an abortion. Since she was not conscious during the attack, the injury did not stem from her resistance. Another contracted venereal disease, which led to pelvic inflammatory

18. Pauline B. Bart and Patricia H. O'Brien, "The Aftermath of Rape and Rape Avoidance: Behaviors, Attitudes, Ideologies and Response of Significant Others" (paper presented at the International Sociological Association meeting, Mexico City, August 1982).

19. Pauline B. Bart, "Social Structures and Vocabularies of Discomfort: What Happened to Female Hysteria?" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 9 (September 1968): 188–93, esp. 189.

20. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, "Characterological versus Behavioral Self-Blame: Inquiries into Depression and Rape," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979): 1798–1809.

disease; she is now permanently sterile. She screamed and tried to reason with her assailant but did not resist physically.

We know that women who resist physically are more likely to avoid rape. We also know that there is little relationship between women's use of physical resistance and rapists' use of additional physical force over and above the attempted rape. True, sexual assault does not usually produce serious physical harm, while physical resistance often results in minor injuries such as bruises and scratches. Some women who used physical force were moderately or seriously injured. One such woman while arguing with her assailant, who was trying to enter her apartment, was punched in the eye and pushed into her apartment where she continued to struggle. Her screams alerted the neighbors who called the police. They arrived in time to stop the rape. A second woman screamed while being attacked in a cornfield and tried to strike her assailant. He pulled a knife, hit her twice with his fist, knocked her unconscious, and raped her. A woman who had decided to submit to rape, rather than be choked to death with a telephone cord, couldn't yield "because he was so dirty." The would-be rapist beat her, but when she yanked at his penis he hurriedly left.

Women who fought back sustained the following kinds of injuries: bruises and bite marks on the neck, soreness for a few days, strained muscles, bruises and minor cuts, more serious cuts, back injury, and aching the next morning. While we asked the women about the assailant's tactics including physical abuse, we did not systematically ask about their own injuries and so there may have been minor injuries not reported. It is likely, however, that all the women who had serious injuries told us of them.

To judge the correlation between injury and physical resistance we must consider the interviews of the 5 women who were brutally beaten or suffered serious injury. Three were raped and 2 avoided being raped. Both avoiders' injuries resulted from their having fought back. However, for one of them, the resistance delayed the rape long enough for a train to pull into the platform where the assault was taking place, and the assailants fled. A third woman who was raped fought back even though her assailant had an ice pick as a weapon. It is unclear whether her beating was in response to her fighting back or to her screams. A raped virgin, attacked by two armed assailants, fought back and was seriously injured. But the injury was a result not of her struggle but of her seven rapes and her escape method. The last woman became sterile, as we described above.

These experiences suggest that by fighting back a woman significantly increases her chances of rape avoidance and somewhat increases her chance of rough treatment. However, not resisting is no guarantee of humane treatment.

Degree of Acquaintance with Assailant

Do women respond differently when attacked by men they know than when attacked by strangers? If so, is such difference in response associated with whether the outcome of the attack is rape or rape avoidance? Being assaulted by a stranger results in different patterns of response than does being assaulted by an acquaintance (see table 5). Raped women were more likely to yell or scream as well as to use both cognitive and affective verbal strategies when the assailant was a stranger than when he was someone they knew. Women who stopped their rapes did not respond differently to their assailant whether or not they knew him—except that they were more likely to yell or scream when the assailant was a stranger. There was also environmental intervention more often among women who were not raped.

Environmental intervention, in general, occurred more frequently for women who avoided rape. In only two instances did raped women experience environmental intervention, and in both of these the assailant was a stranger. It should be noted that the mere occurrence of environmental intervention was not always sufficient to thwart attack. Sometimes the assailant(s) fled. But sometimes the woman had to be able to utilize such an opportunity in order to escape. One woman, for instance, who had been pinned against an alley wall, was able to flee when the sudden noise of a fire engine's siren caused her assailant to loosen his grip. On another occasion a woman had negotiated with her assailant to rape her in his van rather than in the alley where he first attacked her. While walking

Table 5

Strategies of Rape Avoidance, by Outcome
of Attack and Degree of Acquaintance^a

	Raped Women (N = 43)		Rape Avoiders (N = 51)	
	Known Assailant (%)	Stranger (%)	Known Assailant (%)	Stranger (%)
Fled or tried to flee	4.5	4.5	14.0	20.0
Screamed	12.0	23.0	20.0	29.0
Used physical force	19.0	14.0	28.0	31.0
Used cognitive verbal strategies	28.0	44.0	35.0	35.0
Used affective verbal strategies	9.0	23.0	10.0	12.0
Benefited from environmental intervention .....	...	5.0	6.0	14.0

^aPercentages are based on the 43 raped women and the 51 rape avoiders, respectively. Thus, 4.5 percent of the raped women knew their assailants and tried to flee, and 4.5 percent of the raped women were attacked by strangers and tried to flee.

with him to the van, she saw a strange man approach and asked him to help her. Although he never actually intervened, she used this opportunity to break away and run to a nearby tavern.

Presence of a Weapon

Conventional wisdom would suggest that the most important variable in a woman's response to attack is the assailant's possession of a weapon. And indeed, presence of a weapon does influence the outcome.²¹ Of the group of women who were attacked by an unarmed assailant, 37 percent (19) were raped and 63 percent (32) avoided rape. Of the group of women who were attacked when an assailant had a weapon, when a weapon was presumed to be present, or when the assailant used a weapon to threaten or wound the woman, 56 percent (24) were raped and 44 percent (19) stopped the rape. The last point needs emphasis, however; even where there was some indication of a weapon, 44 percent of the women avoided being raped.

When the assailant had a weapon, 2 raped women fled, and 16 did not; 8 rape avoiders fled, and 6 did not. When the assailant had a weapon, 6 raped women screamed, and 12 did not; 4 avoiders screamed and 10 did not. When a weapon was present, 4 raped women used physical force, and 14 did not; 5 avoiders used that strategy, and 9 did not. When the assailant was armed, 13 raped women and 11 avoiders used cognitive verbal strategies. Five raped women and 3 avoiders did not use such strategies. Four raped women faced with weapons used affective verbal strategies and 12 did not, while 4 avoiders used this strategy and 10 did not. Of the 5 victims who used no strategies 3 were faced with armed assailants, and in 2 cases the assailant was not armed.

Since much of the debate about rape avoidance focuses on whether women should use physical force, it is important that one of the most striking differences between raped women and rape avoiders occurred in the case where the assailant did not have a weapon. In such situations, three-quarters (24) of the avoiders used physical strategies while one-quarter (8) did not; about half (9) of the raped women used such strategies, and about half (10) did not.

Being Attacked While Asleep

We have already seen that the most obvious situational variable, presence of a weapon, is associated with victimization rather than with avoidance. But we have also seen that even under such circumstances

21. This finding is also reported in McDermott (n. 6 above). According to our study this relationship does not hold for Black women.

some women avoid rape. We will now turn to another variable that makes appropriate defense difficult and, in fact, according to Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrum, has particularly long-lasting effects: being attacked while asleep.²² Two of the 5 women who were asleep used no strategies. How did the women who were not raped manage to avoid the assault? None pleaded, although all used cognitive verbal strategies. One, whom we call the "Super Negotiator," screamed, talked, and fought. Another talked, used physical force, and took advantage of environmental intervention. Their assailants were armed in both cases, and yet both women physically resisted. A third screamed and used cognitive verbal strategies, while a fourth was one of the few women who was able to avoid rape simply by persuading the man that she was not interested. The latter case is particularly striking because the assailant was later apprehended on numerous rape charges. While in prison, he wrote a letter to one of the women he raped in which he mentioned that, while he really liked her, he did not like another woman he tried to assault. We interviewed this second woman for our study. But he asked the woman to whom he wrote the letter why he was being charged with assault when he actually was raping.²³

Two case histories give a sense of the kinds of strategies that can be employed in difficult situations. One of them involves the five-foot eight-inch tall Super Negotiator. She awoke to find herself pinned beneath the covers of her bed by a naked, armed man who was straddling her. She made an attempt to reach the phone but agreed to give up this bid for assistance in return for his removing a knife from her throat. She told the assailant she was menstruating and feigned embarrassment at the thought of removing her tampon in his presence. He agreed to allow her to go to the bathroom. However, once there, he would not allow her to close the door and scream for help. After removing her tampon, she refused to return to the bedroom, claiming that the knife, which was still in the room, frightened her. At this point, the assailant removed the knife from the nightstand and threw it down the hallway. She had attempted unsuccessfully to convince him to throw it outdoors, but he claimed that walking through the living room might cause him to be seen. Returning to the bedroom, he began to fondle her breasts and digitally penetrate her vagina. In response she feigned hysteria, in an effort to make him think that she was "going crazy." Finding this strategy unsuccessful, she asked if she could smoke some hash in order to relax. The hash pipe was big and heavy, and initially she planned on using it as a weapon; however, she was unable to work up enough nerve. After pretending to smoke for awhile,

22. Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda L. Holmstrum, *Rape: Crisis and Recovery* (Bowie, Md.: Robert J. Brady, 1979).

23. Personal communication with Mary Pennington Anderson, attorney in the case.

she asked if it would be all right if she went to the kitchen for a beer, as the hash had not had the desired effect. He refused and shoved her on her back on the bed. She responded by jumping and throwing him on his back, grabbing his hair and yanking his head as hard as she could over the footboard of the bed. The assailant began to whimper. She reprimanded him for being "pushy" and for hurting her, and once again made her request for a beer and cigarette. The assailant complied, but retrieved his knife and followed her to the kitchen, pressing the knife to her back.

Once in the kitchen, she had hoped to make her escape, but she found that this was not possible. Not having any beer in the refrigerator, she successfully passed off a can of soda as a beer. As they were walking back to the bedroom she feigned anger at their return to the initial scenario—being in the bedroom with an armed man. In order to appease her, he placed the knife on the bookcase in the living room. For the first time since the start of the incident, she knew exactly where the knife was; thus, it would be accessible if she could somehow maneuver away from him. After smoking her cigarette and drinking the "beer," she clutched her stomach, pretending nausea, and ran out of the room. When he realized that she wasn't heading for the bathroom, he began to pursue her, but by this time she had reached the knife. He reached for a nearby lamp, which he intended to use as a weapon, but discovered that it was far too light to be useful. At this point she was moving toward the door and he said, "All right, that's it, I'm leaving. I was gonna try to be nice, but I'm leaving. Forget it." She ran out the back door and screamed for help. He made a couple of attempts to run out after her, but every time he did, she'd raise the knife to threaten him. Finally, he made a dash out the door, still naked from the waist down, carrying his pants. Less than a week after the attack, he parked his car behind her building after following her home from work. She flagged down a police car and he was apprehended.

Another case in which a woman was faced with seemingly impossible odds against avoiding assault involved a five-foot-ten-inch worker in a drug rehabilitation center. After completing her duties one evening, she crawled into her sleeping bag and fell asleep. Not long afterward, one of the residents came in asking for the time. In her stupor, she yelled at him and he appeared to leave. The next thing she knew "he was on top of" her with a knife pressed to her neck. Initially she froze, but then she fought him. Somehow she managed to get him off and get to the door, all the while screaming at the top of her lungs. After escaping from the room, she ran into a very large fellow female worker. Two women were too much for this assailant and he took off. Returning from the hospital, the avoider and a female companion spotted the assailant on the highway and reported his presence to the police. He was apprehended.

While both of these women were comparatively tall, we do not think it was simply their size that made the difference, although women five feet

seven inches and over proved more likely to avoid rape. Rather, we suggest that short and tall women are treated differently in this society. Tall women do not have the option of being “cute” or acting helpless. They are less likely than short women to have a trained incapacity to be competent and assertive. Therefore, they are less likely to have the option of assuming the traditional “feminine” role, which rape analysts such as Susan Brownmiller and Susan Griffin suggest is conducive to being a rape victim.²⁴

Much of what occurs in any assault depends on the woman’s interaction with her assailant. In our interviews we discovered that women were able to negotiate parts of the scenario. Although it was difficult to avoid genital intercourse itself through negotiation, some of the women whom we interviewed were able to negotiate their way out of other sex acts after intercourse was completed; several through argument avoided sodomy, fellatio, and multiple acts of intercourse. Women also made bargains involving money or credit cards, negotiated regarding the place of assault, and modified some of the conditions of their assaults—arranged to be tied up in a more comfortable position, got assistance in walking from one place to another. The Super Negotiator superbly illustrates the range of individual negotiations.²⁵

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Women who avoided rape used more kinds of strategies in response to the assault than women who were raped. They also used different strategies. Strategies associated with avoidance were fleeing or trying to flee, yelling, and using physical force. In cases where rape was avoided, there was also more likely to be environmental intervention. Women who were raped were more likely to use no strategies (no woman who avoided rape fell into this category) or to rely on affective verbal strategies. The most common strategies used were cognitive verbal—reasoning, verbally refusing, threatening, and conning. Use of such tactics, though they are frequently advised, did not differentiate raped women from those who avoided rape, and those strategies alone were rarely effective. The modal

24. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975); Susan Griffin, “Rape: The All-American Crime,” *Ramparts* 10 (September 1971): 26–35.

25. While we have been focusing on rape avoidance strategies as a way of coping with assault, there were additional ways in which women coped. Depersonalization—feeling as if it were not happening to someone else, as if it were not really happening, as if one were dreaming—was a relatively common response, although, as one might expect, it was more common among raped women. Thus, 44 percent (19) of the raped women mentioned they experienced depersonalization, while 22 percent (11) of the avoiders had this response.

response which resulted in avoidance was a combination of yelling and using physical force. While the assailant's having a weapon made rape the more probable outcome, 37 percent of the women who avoided rape did so when the assailant was armed or claimed to be armed.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study and because ours was not a random sample, caution should be used in interpreting these results. Nonetheless, four empirical studies comparing the strategies of raped women and rape avoiders came up with similar findings. It is no accident that these findings, which suggest that women should physically resist their assailants, run counter to official ideology that women can avoid rape by behaving in ways more consonant with traditional socialization. Since rape is, after all, a paradigm of sexism in society,²⁶ it is not surprising that male advice to women on how to avoid rape also reflects that paradigm.

The tactics that women are usually advised to employ—verbal strategies, feigning insanity, or appealing to the assailant's humanity—are relatively ineffective. One might well conclude not only that the traditional ideology regarding rape is a form of social control over women,²⁷ but that traditional advice on rape avoidance also functions in this manner. This advice, when not such simple caveats about restricting one's behavior as "don't go out at night," suggests coping strategies consistent with the conventional female role, particularly use of verbal skills to manipulate the situation rather than confrontational behavior and fighting back. One police official is quoted as saying, "We recommend passive resistance, like getting a person's confidence by talking and doing what you were taught to do as girls growing up, to help resist attack."²⁸

The importance of the policy implications of our study is augmented by Diana Russell and Nancy Howell's recently published report of an intensive interview survey in San Francisco. They demonstrated the pervasiveness of the problem of sexual assault, contending "that there is at least a 26 percent probability that a woman in that city will become the victim of completed rape at some time in her life, and a 46 percent probability that she will become a victim of rape *or* attempted rape."²⁹ They conclude that the feminist analysis of rape, which states that sexual violence against women is endemic, is supported by research.

26. Pauline B. Bart, "Rape as a Paradigm of Sexism in Society," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1979): 347–57.

27. Stephanie Riger and Margaret T. Gordon, "The Fear of Rape: A Study in Social Control," *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (1981): 71–92.

28. Quoted in Tacie Dejanikus, "New Studies Support Active Resistance to Rape," *Off Our Backs*, February 1981, pp. 9, 23.

29. Diana E. H. Russell and Nancy Howell, "The Prevalence of Rape in the United States Revisited," *Signs* 8, no. 4 (1983): 688–95, esp. 695.

Feminist analysis has succeeded in making the point that rape is not a joke, that it has detrimental effects not only on the particular woman who is assaulted but on all women. For even though not all women are raped, fear of rape causes women generally to constrict their behavior.³⁰ Thus, it is clearly important to have data-based advice on which strategies are most effective in stopping a sexual assault. Indeed, since the National Institute of Mental Health released our findings, not only have the media been interested in disseminating our results—albeit in simplified form—but rape crisis centers and police departments have asked for our reports and papers so that they could be incorporated into their programs. We thus have the privilege of knowing that the pain our respondents endured not only during their assaults but in anticipation of their interviews, and the stress we experienced while listening to them and while analyzing the data, have not been in vain.

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30. Riger and Gordon (n. 27 above).